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Globalization and interdependence: international migration and development

Summary of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development

Note by the President of the General Assembly

I. Format and participation

1. In accordance with paragraph 23 of General Assembly resolution 60/227 of 23 December 2005, the President of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly has the honour to transmit herewith the summary of the first High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development that the General Assembly conducted on 14 and 15 September 2006 at United Nations Headquarters.

2. The High-level Dialogue was opened by the President of the General Assembly. Her statement was followed by statements from the Secretary-General and the President of the Economic and Social Council. The Dialogue included four plenary meetings at which statements were made by high-level officials of 127 Member States, including 1 Vice-President, 47 ministers and 40 vice-ministers. Representatives of 1 Observer State and 10 intergovernmental entities and organizations having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the sessions and the work of the Assembly also made statements.

3. Four interactive round tables were held during the afternoon of 14 September and the morning of 15 September. Participants in the round tables included 162 high-level representatives of Member States, officials of 16 United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, the Executive Secretaries of 2 United Nations regional commissions, the Director-General of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and representatives of 12 non-governmental organizations, civil society and private sector entities.

4. Each round table considered a different topic. Round table 1 focused on the effects of international migration on economic and social development and was chaired by Tarja Filatov, Minister of Labour of Finland. Round table 2 discussed measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of all migrants.

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and to prevent and combat smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons, and had Francisco Laínez, Minister for Foreign Affairs of El Salvador, as chair. Round table 3 considered the multidimensional aspects of international migration and development, including remittances, and was chaired by Kastriot Sulka, Deputy Minister of Labour, Welfare and Equal Opportunities of Albania. Round table 4 discussed ways of promoting the building of partnerships and capacity-building and the sharing of best practices at all levels, including the bilateral and regional levels, for the benefit of countries and migrants alike, and was chaired by Jean-François Ndongou, Deputy to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Gabon.

5. At the afternoon plenary meeting on 15 September, summaries of the deliberations conducted in the round tables were presented orally by the chairpersons of the round tables. After all the statements in the plenary were made, the President of the General Assembly delivered a closing statement.

II. Key issues

6. The High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development demonstrated the strong commitment of Member States, United Nations entities, observers, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to examining the relationship and synergies between international migration and development. There was general consensus that the High-level Dialogue presented a unique opportunity to identify ways and means to maximize the developmental benefits of international migration and to reduce its negative impacts.

7. Participants stressed the global character of international migration. They affirmed that international migration was a growing phenomenon, both in scope and in complexity, affecting virtually all countries in the world. They agreed that international migration could be a positive force for development in both countries of origin and countries of destination, provided that it was supported by the right set of policies.

8. Participants noted that international migrants contributed to development in both developing and developed countries. In some countries, migrants were essential in meeting labour shortages. A number of participants also underscored the social and cultural contributions of migrants. Some countries reported on their long experience in receiving and integrating international migrants. Other countries had only recently become migrant receiving countries. Many participants mentioned how their countries had benefited from the emigration of their citizens and from the financial and other contributions that migrant communities had made to the development of their countries. The role of migrant entrepreneurs in reinvigorating urban areas was mentioned.

9. Participants felt that it was essential to address the root causes of international migration to ensure that people migrated out of choice rather than necessity. They observed that people often had to migrate because of poverty, conflict, human rights violations, poor governance or lack of employment. There was widespread support for incorporating international migration issues in national development plans, including poverty reduction strategies. Participants noted that international migration could contribute to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, but cautioned against viewing international migration by itself as a long-term development

strategy. The need to generate jobs with decent working conditions and to ensure that sustainable livelihoods were possible in all countries was emphasized.

10. Participants recognized that international migration, development and human rights were intrinsically interconnected. Respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of all migrants was considered essential for reaping the full benefits of international migration. Many noted that some vulnerable groups, such as migrant women and children, needed special protection. Governments were called upon to ratify and implement the core human rights conventions and other relevant international instruments, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. Participants underlined the need for concerted efforts on the part of Governments to combat xenophobia, discrimination, racism and the social exclusion of migrant populations.

11. Participants emphasized that the social consequences of international migration deserved urgent attention. The integration of international migrants in receiving countries required mutual adaptation and acceptance by both the host society and the migrants themselves. It was important to combat all types of intolerance. Information campaigns about the positive contribution of international migrants to the host society and about the rights and responsibilities of international migrants were deemed useful.

12. Participants acknowledged that remittances were the most tangible benefit of international migration for countries of origin. They noted that the volume of remittances had increased markedly in recent years. While remittances benefited millions of families of migrants, participants believed that their development potential could be enhanced by appropriate measures. These encompassed increasing competition among money-transfer companies and banks to reduce transfer fees, improving the access to banking services, including credit, of migrants and their families and expanding financial literacy in countries of origin. There was consensus that remittances were private flows and should not be considered a substitute for official development assistance, direct foreign investment or debt relief. Some participants warned about the potentially negative consequences of remittances, including the culture of dependency that they might foster at both the household and national levels.

13. Participants agreed that migrant communities had significant potential to contribute to the development of their countries of origin. A number of countries had taken measures to strengthen ties with their nationals abroad and to encourage highly skilled workers in the direction of return and circular migration. Several participants noted that, through co-development projects, migrant entrepreneurs had been agents of development in their countries of origin. The role of international migrants in transferring know-how, skills, technology, expertise and new ways of thinking to their countries of origin was also underscored.

14. Participants also focused on ways of minimizing the negative consequences of highly skilled emigration from developing countries. The outflow of highly skilled workers from the health and education sectors was of particular concern, since it compromised the delivery of services in countries of origin. Participants urged the implementation of measures to retain highly skilled workers by, among other things, ensuring equitable pay and decent working conditions. The promotion of return, even on a temporary basis, of skilled workers to their countries of origin was also recommended. Some participants noted that their countries had adopted or were

about to adopt codes of conduct barring the active recruitment of health workers from developing countries affected by labour shortages in the health and education sectors. A number of participants suggested that cooperative arrangements could be made to train skilled workers in developing countries and others argued for different mechanisms for compensation.

15. Participants remarked that labour migration was crucial for the world economy. In some countries, the labour market was highly dependent on foreign workers. In others, temporary labour migration allowed for the filling of specific labour needs. Participants noted that the relatively high participation of women in labour migration had prompted some countries to re-examine their labour migration regulations and procedures to ensure that they were gender sensitive and that they offered adequate protection for female migrants.

16. Participants noted that about half of all international migrants were female. Women, like men, migrated in order to improve their livelihoods. For many women migration was a means of empowerment. The entrepreneurial potential of female migrants deserved support, and the contribution of migrant women to development in both countries of origin and those of destination had to be recognized. However, migration also entailed risks that were often more serious for women than for men, especially when women were relegated to undesirable low-paying jobs. It was important, therefore, to adopt policies that addressed the particular circumstances and experiences of female migrants and reduced their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Women and girls who were victims of trafficking were entitled to special protection.

17. Participants expressed concern about the increase in irregular migration and the exploitation and abuse of migrants in an irregular situation. There was general consensus that trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants, especially women and children, should be combated with urgency at the national, bilateral, regional and global levels. Some participants noted that restrictive migration policies contributed to an increase in irregular migration and argued for an increase in legal avenues for migration and for the regularization of migrants in an irregular situation. Participants suggested that information campaigns highlighting the dangers involved in migrating without authorization could help in reducing irregular flows. Although effective border control was considered necessary by many participants, there was recognition that security and control measures alone would not eliminate irregular migration. Hence, there was a call for migration policies that could produce a better balance between unmet labour demand and the inflows of workers from abroad. Participants also underscored that measures to control irregular migration should not prevent persons fleeing persecution and other vulnerable populations from seeking international protection.

18. Most participants considered that national strategies to address the impact of international migration on development should be complemented by strengthened bilateral, regional and multilateral cooperation. They considered that such cooperation was needed to promote legal, safe and orderly migration, reduce irregular migration and improve the chances of reaping the full benefits of international migration. The proliferation of regional consultative processes was seen by participants as proof that cooperation was particularly effective at the regional level. Many participants provided examples of regional mechanisms that

through improved dialogue and better mutual understanding, had led to practical measures to address migration issues.

19. Participants also recognized the usefulness of bilateral agreements and cited examples of those addressing labour migration, the portability of pensions, the readmission of nationals or the fight against trafficking in persons and the smuggling of migrants. Many participants considered that regional and bilateral initiatives had to be complemented by initiatives at the global level, noting that the United Nations was a natural venue for such initiatives. Participants also mentioned the work of the Global Commission on International Migration, whose report provided useful guidance, the International Agenda for Migration Management, produced by the Berne Initiative, and the annual dialogue on migration policy sponsored by IOM.

III. Follow-up to the High-level Dialogue

20. Nearly all Member States participating in the High-level Dialogue expressed an interest in the continuation of global dialogue on international migration and development. There was widespread support for the proposal of the Secretary-General to create a global forum as a venue for discussing issues related to international migration and development in a systematic and comprehensive way.

21. Many participants stressed that, if established, the forum should foster practical, evidence-based measures to enhance the benefits of international migration and minimize its negative effects. The forum, participants noted, should be informal, voluntary and led by Member States operating in a transparent and open manner. It would not produce negotiated outcomes or normative decisions, but it would promote closer cooperation among Governments.

22. A number of participants cautioned that the proposed forum should avoid duplicating existing structures and ongoing activities in other entities. If established, the forum was expected to rely on the existing expertise in the United Nations system and other international organizations. It would build on the experiences of regional consultative processes and work closely with the recently established Global Migration Group. The precise relationship between the forum and the United Nations was the subject of some debate. One proposal was to link the forum to the United Nations through the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on International Migration and Development, Peter Sutherland.

23. A few participants argued that adequate means to address international migration issues already existed in different entities or structures, including in the United Nations system. They favoured the use of existing institutions, including IOM and the Global Migration Group, to continue addressing the international migration and development nexus. Some participants considered that dialogue could be more effective at the regional level than at the global level, perhaps enhanced by a periodic meeting of the chairs of the regional processes.

24. The Government of Belgium offered to host the first meeting of the global forum in 2007, an offer that was generally welcomed. The Secretary-General stated that, should Member States deem it useful, he was ready to establish a voluntary trust fund to support the activities of the forum. His decision to extend the mandate of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on International Migration and Development received wide support.